THE ARK ON THE LAKE:

ANIMAL WISHES FROM NORTHERN MINNESOTA

CYNTHIA TRABER VOELKE

With Jeremy Hein

Dedication

To my two little greats — Everett and Emma, and their dandelion wishes.

Acknowledgment

I thank Annette Gagliardi, Minnesota Poet Laureate, for her helpful guidance about chapbook publishing and her support for poetry in our state.

Copyright © 2026 by Dandelion Press
All rights reserved.

This chapbook may be copied, shared, or distributed **for educational and other noncommercial purposes**.
No part of this publication may be reproduced for sale or commercial distribution without written permission from the author or her representative.

First edition, 2026
Edited by Jeremy Hein
Cover design by Rose Hein

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 979-8-90383-158-6

AUTHOR'S WELCOME TO READERS

My great-grandparents had a small farm on some poor land in the hills of southern Missouri about 100 miles from St. Louis where I was born. They tried to grow what crops they could, mostly to feed their one cow and themselves. I often heard my great-grandparents say: "The only thing this land can grow is rocks." They had a barnyard full of animals and a stream nearby where my grandmother would go with a stick, a piece of string, and a hook. She hoped to return with bucket of perch or sunfish to make a meal for the family. I loved visiting them and grew up feeling that the animals in the area where just as much my family as the people. Laying on the ground watching a society of ants go about their business or following a tortoise on its slow adventure was a world of fun for me. That is how I came to feel that even animals had wishes.

The following poems are about animals that became my friends when I was living in northern Minnesota near some of my children and their families. I haven't included all the animals I got to know and I hope that you will use the space at the end of this book to write your own poems about an eagle, wolf, fox, deer, owl, or perhaps a coyote. I also hope you will use your imagination to figure out what a hippo, python, or another animal from around the world might wish for. Remember, poems don't have to rhyme. They only need to put into words a roar, a croak, a squeak, or a whirring of wings.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cynthia Traber Voelke was born in St. Louis, Missouri. She is now 84 and writes poems from her room in a long term care home in St. Paul.

CONTENTS

AUTHOR'S WELCOME TO READERS 3

INTRODUCTION 5

POEMS

- The Wish of the Moose 6
- The Wish of the Pond Frog 8
- The Wish of the Grass Spider 10
- The Wish of the Box Turtle 11
- The Wish of the Chipmunk 12
- The Wish of the Beaver 13
- The Wish of the Canada Goose 14
- The Wish of the Brown Bear 16
- The Wish of the Snowshoe Hare 18
- The Wish of the Walleye 19
- The Wish of the Mayfly 20
- The Wish of the Red-Sided Garter Snake 21
- The Wish of the Monarch 22

Glossary 23

Guide for Nature Educators 24

Habitats and Seasons Worksheet 26

Guide For Language Arts Teachers 27

Write Your Own Poem Here 28

Note to Teachers and Educators 29

INTRODUCTION

It's a warm summer day in the meadow. A breeze moves the grasses and wild flowers at your feet. Right in front of you is a huge, white dandelion globe. Its yellow petals have fallen off and it is now full of seeds. You pick it. You begin to think of a special, secret wish, one that will surely come true because this is the biggest wishing puff you have ever found. But just as you are about to blow the seeds into the wind a strange thought occurs to you. If a moose found this dandelion, what would it wish for?

The Wish of the Moose

I know I'm not terribly handsome
more homely.
I am the Abe Lincoln
of the animal world
gawky
not graceful
ungainly
stilts for legs
and platters for feet
knees of knobs
brown hide of moth holes.
I'm a big secret
in a small
marshy meadow.
I belong to the
northern lands.
My life is in
wondrous
waterways.
I don't wish
for what others have
the delicacy of the deer
the wisdom of the owl
the pride of the wolf…
for beauty
abundance
protection.
In huge humbleness
meekly
I wish to
live
freely
delivered from
tiny horrid hindrances.
Relieve me
of the no-see-ums!
I must admit

I am defeated
by the insignificant smidgens
who ingest me
one bite
at a time
a million drops of blood.
I am no more
than a wandering banquet.
My patience tried
tormented
tortured
I cannot forgive.
I wish
to rid my bogs
of the bugs
the hovering
winged strings
who screech
annoyances
glutting
themselves
with me
reducing me
to welts
moose mulligatawny.
I am the bloody broth of their lives.
I know
if they were gone
I could rejoice
while wading the shallows
and live in dignity
if not beauty.

The Wish of the Pond Frog

O Great Green Basso…
You are a most welcome guest
here
in my water-world
where all things are wet
or winged.
Please come sit
beside me
in my floating kingdom
of lily-pads.
Let Your Green Greatness
settle here
close to me now
but gingerly
gently.
Watch
as night comes
silent and secure
as a misty-moist
hiss of rain
washes over all.
See
as the silvered summer moon
peers at us
through lingering clouds
lighting our lagoon
preparing the stage
for the green chorus.
We will be soon
crooning
croaking
our pond medleys.
We wish only for an aria
from You
sung in
basso profundo.
If You sing for us
I'll share with You

my most succulent savories
my juiciest flies.
I will show You how to
capture
these most delicate of morsels
at midnight.

The Wish of the Grass Spider

I am delicate, deliberate, diligent
and yet so misunderstood.
Some call me
savage
cannibal
fearing my barbed feet.
I say
practical
small
cleaver.
I have only my wits
and age-old applique
of the finest denier
steel
spun from my body
to entrap
enlace
enshrine
my victims.
I am a
ballerina
fearless huntress
weaver
spinner of traps
catcher of dreams
summer dreams
of my own escape.
I wish for tiptoes
to dance
along the branch of this wild rose
to leave my filigreed boundaries
for just a moment
to see the world
beyond my orb.

The Wish of the Box Turtle

I do not wish for speed, only
the familiar path
of cool shadows
and warm summer light
that assures arrival
survival.
I dispatch the distance
doggedly
deliberately
satisfied with
mushrooms
blackberries
crickets
worms.
I confidently carry
the phrenology of forest and meadow
on the dome of my home.
I am the eternal terrestrial with
earth between my toes
wise
a self-contained
old one
a rotund oracle
in my portable cloister.
Please knock before entering.

The Wish of the Chipmunk

Early yummy morn.
I yawn.
I stretch awake
    in my zippy fur suit
    of stripes
    to enjoy
    spending a day
    harvesting
    gathering
    my favorite eatables.
Aren't face pouches wonderful?
On one side I stuff
    these um…
    ...okecher...es
    chokecherries
    raspberries
    huckleberries.
On the other side I stuff
    what I find
    under the picnic table.
Thank you last of the picnickers
    who dropped
    popcorn
    peanuts
    pretzels
    marshmallows.
I only wish to ask
    what will you drop tomorrow?

The Wish of the Beaver

Yes, I hear you calling.
And I wish we could
sit and chat
for a while
in my lodge.
But the nights will soon be long
and I need to collect
twigs
of aspen, birch, poplar, and cottonwood
for our family meals.
Wait!
Listen!
Don't you hear
tiny trills
a trickle
a tinkling stream?
There is always so much to do in my pond.
I must work on my dam
unceasingly
wishing for more
daylight and
reeds and grass
mud and small stones.
Just
one
more
moment.
There!
Now, you were saying…
Wait!
Could you come back tomorrow?

The Wish of the Canada Goose

Ever vigilant, ever patient.
We know
    our time will come.
We stand ready
    anticipating
    the call.
Nightly we listen.
Daily we watch
    for the time
    to form
    our sacred V
    to fly
    to flee
    southward.
We are
    the immortal messengers
    of riches
    red...gold...purple.
We are the wedges
    the waves of autumn
    crossing
    the harvest moon.
We ride high
    ahead
    of winter winds
    blown by
    Boreas from behind.
We follow
    silver frost byways below
    a map of stars above.
Together we sing
    our flyway songs
    age old calls
    from the heart
    of promises
    of freedom.
Together we wish for
    an unerring guide

who will deliver us
safely
my family and me
as we
fly our pilgrimage
the fall gauntlet
to wintering places of peace.

The Wish of the Brown Bear

Mother Earth
pull me now
into Yourself
where I may
seek
refuge and rest.
Heavy
gravid
expectant
I carry within
the future
cubs of spring.
Alone, there is no one
to teach me.
So tell me tales.
Tell me stories
of the great ones.
Your warm words
woven of
their bravery
will blanket me
as I fall into slumber
secure
in the deep sleep arms
of winter snows
of regeneration.
Tell me of my sisters
the Great Bears of White Lands
the Golden Bears of the Western Meadows
the Black Dancing Bears of the Steppes
the Fearless Red Bears of the Rock Mountains.
Tell me of the great
Star Bear who
each night
dances across the sky
chasing the moon.
From them
will I draw hope and strength.

As I slip into
my winter rest
whisper a lullaby
Your earth secrets
for my coming young
of salmon water-trails
of liquid gold catches
smooth and sweet
full laden
blueberry bushes.
Earth Mother
hold me
bless me
tightly
within Your
umber embrace.
I came here alone.
We will leave here three.
We'll be well
in this leafy womb
my earthen
birth room
pillowed with maidenhair.
I'll bring my daughters to You
for the rites of spring.

The Wish of the Snowshoe Hare

You are here!
You have found me
at dusk
in a snowy field
awake
watching
the silver trimmed clouds
be carried away
by north winds.
Let us go
to our feast.
We will
nibble
nosh
munch on
fast frozen food
freeze dried
brown buds
fallen
last summer.
But...listen!
I hear them
lynx, fox, owl.
Hurry!
Flee!
We must run from
claws, fangs, beaks.
Snowshoe feet
long
strong
flat
furry.
Please take us back swiftly
past snowy drifts
glittering
in the winter moon light
to shadows
under tall pines.

The Wish of the Walleye

I don’t know what everyone is complaining about.
In bitter winter
go deep
lie quiet
worship
under stained glass
layers of ice.
Live free, but with less,
in a watery wonderland of
cool splintered
sun
chill silver shimmers
secret water weed trails.
And yet I do wish for
spring
to come in its own time
to swim the rocky shield
to spawn
to hunt from dawn
to dusk
in a watercolor world.

The Wish of the Mayfly

I wish to live more than an instant.
My life is
counted
in minutes
I will not know the minutia
only heights of ecstasy
on the whirls of warm winds.
My whole lifetime
must be completed
hurriedly
lived in
a jot
a blink
a breeze
sunrise to sunrise
of a spring day.
I am created
with graceful extravagance
heaped in careless abundance
generously feeding
feasting
gorging
those who depend
on my lace-winged
corpse.
I live
my allotted life
my numbered heartbeats
within this universe of infinite ages.

The Wish of the Red-Sided Garter Snake

Tell me why
    hidden in a careful coil
    in the verdant grasses of spring
    I above all others am
    so despised
    so persecuted
    so cursed.
I must be silent.
I must
    glide
    slide
    slither
    alert
    unblinking.
But if you look
    am I not most beautiful?
Stripes of
    yellow
    black
    red
    on a glossy green
    hissing a whispered secret.
Yesss, I wisssh
    to be simply let alone
    so I can have my lunch
    in a sunny spot
    my only guests
    crickets
    field mice
    worms.

The Wish of the Monarch

Midwife of Miracles please stand
close
as I am birthed
from my swaddle
of opaline gauze.
Cradle me gently.
I am afraid
to come out
for fear
of what I will be
after I am free.
Yet your warmth
encourages me.
I rustle and writhe
impatient.
Breath softly
unfurl me
give me new life
as I emerge
from my voile wrappings
into monarchial majesty.
Yes, I remember now.
I embody possibility.
I
arise
and
soar.
I will find the way back north
on invisible routes.
Good-bye.

GLOSSARY

allotted — given or set aside for a certain purpose or amount of time
aria — a solo song, usually sung in a strong, beautiful voice
basso profundo — a very deep, low singing voice
bounty — plenty of something; a generous amount
Boreas — the name of the cold north wind in old stories
cloister — a quiet, sheltered place
constancy — staying the same; being steady and dependable
denier — a measure of how thin or fine a thread is
enshrine — to protect or hold something in a special way
extravagance — something fancy, extra, or more than needed
filigreed — decorated with fine, lace-like patterns
gauntlet — a series of difficult tasks or opponents
glossy — shiny and smooth
gravid — carrying babies inside the body; pregnant
iridescent — a shiny glow
lagoon — a small, calm body of water
luxuriant — rich, full, and growing strongly
medley — a mixture
minutia — tiny details
monarchial — like a monarch or king; grand and royal
mulligatawny — a thick, rich soup or stew
nectar — sweet liquid inside flowers
opaline — pale and glowing like an opal stone
persecuted — treated unfairly or picked on
pilgrimage — a long, important journey
platter — a large, flat surface (like a big plate)
soprano — a high singing voice
swaddle — to wrap tightly in a blanket
regeneration — growing back or being renewed
terrestrial — living on land
umber — a dark brown color
unceasingly — without stopping
ungainly — awkward or not graceful
verdant — very green with growing plants
vigilant — alert to danger
voile — a thin, soft, see-through fabric
writhe — to wiggle from side to side

GUIDE FOR NATURE EDUCATORS

Ideas and discussion prompts to increase environmental awareness.

The Moose: Despite their size and ungainly legs, they are excellent swimmers. They can dive as deep as 15 feet to find them the tastiest aquatic plants.

The Pond Frog: They are aquatic, which makes them different from toads, who live on land. They prefer to eat mosquito larvae still in the ponds, and can consume thousands before the larvae turn into flying mosquitoes.

The Grass Spider: They have eight legs, which means scientists do not define them as insects, such as ants, which have six legs. Insects have three body parts, and also may have wings and antennae. The wolf spider hunts insects and does not use a web like the grass spider.

The Box Turtle: They live on land, which makes them different from other turtles who are aquatic. A box turtle tends to spend its entire life within a few hundred feet of its home base, and likes to revisit favorite spots for food and shelter.

The Chipmunk: They can carry more than100 sunflower seeds in their cheek pouches. Given their small size, that would be like you filling your backpack with these seeds.

The Beaver: They eat the leaves, twigs, and inner bark of the trees they cut down for their dam. Their favorites are aspen, cottonwood, poplar, and willow.

The Canada Goose: They form a V when they fly to get a lift of air from the bird in front. They take turns being the leader, which is the hardest job.

The Brown Bear: About 80% of their food comes from vegetables, fruits, grass, nuts, and mushrooms. Only about 20% is from meat, and that includes insects, carrion, small mammals, and fish. Since they eat plants and meat, they can be called omnivores.

The Snowshoe Hare: They are brown in summer and white in winter. They are different from rabbits, which don't change color and have smaller back feet.

The Walleye: Their eyes have the same light-reflection mechanism as cats, which helps the walleye see in low light in order to catch other fish that don't see as well.

The Mayfly: They live as nymphs for months or years in fresh water. Then they turn into a fly and live for only about 24 hours.

The Red-Sided Garter Snake: They are not poisonous and eat the critters that most people dislike. Their diet includes mice, leeches, insects, slugs, and worms.

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird: They weigh about as much as a penny, but beat their wings about 50 times a second. The hum of their wings makes it rare to hear their small chirping sounds.

The Monarch: They fly about 2,500 miles from Minnesota to Mexico for the winter, where they lay eggs and die. The new monarchs fly to the southwestern part of the U.S., lay eggs on milkweed and die. This northern migration continues for two more generations, until the great-grandchildren are born in Minnesota.

HABITATS AND SEASONS WORKSHEET

POEM	HABITAT	SEASON
The Wish of the Moose		
The Wish of the Pond Frog		
The Wish of the Grass Spider		
The Wish of the Box Turtle		
The Wish of the Chipmunk		
The Wish of the Beaver		
The Wish of the Canada Goose		
The Wish of the Brown Bear		
The Wish of the Snowshoe Hare		
The Wish of the Walleye		
The Wish of the Mayfly		
The Wish of the Red-Sided Garter Snake		
The Wish of the Ruby-Throated Humming Bird		
The Wish of the Monarch		

List of Habitats:

Forest

Meadow / Prairie / Field

Pond / Lake / River / Stream

Marsh / Bog / Wetland

Sky / Air

Underground

GUIDE FOR LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS

Strategies and prompts for exploring the poems through reading and writing.

1. Pick an animal that you have always been curious about. Choosing one you don't know much about can actually make it easier to write a poem.

2. Do a little research on where the animal lives. Write down a few things about what that environment looks like. Animals can live in more than one place so decide if you want to focus on land, water, or air.

3. Think about how the environment you chose might change with different seasons. Also imagine how the environment would be different in the day or night, early in the morning or as the daylight ends. Choose a season and a time of day.

4. Do some research on how your animal has adapted to live in that particular environment. Write down what it eats, what other animals are nearby, where it sleeps, how it adjusts to changing seasons, and if it moves to different environments.

5. Now that you know some facts about your animal, it's time to imagine what it would wish for. Go back and look at your notes. You can easily find something that the animal needs in order to live and survive. In your imagination you can picture what would make the animal really, really happy. If you want to write a funnier poem, you can imagine that your animal is bored with the way it lives and wants to do something different for change! What would it wish for?

WRITE YOUR OWN POEM HERE

NOTE TO TEACHERS AND NATURE EDUCATORS

These poems imagine the inner wishes of northern Minnesota's animals. Each poem introducing real details about the lives of wild creatures but also expresses a feeling a child may recognize: curiosity, fear, hope, frustration, wonder. The collection blends creative writing with ecological learning, helping young readers build emotional connections to wildlife, including misunderstood animals like snakes and spiders, as well as old favorites like the busy beaver.

Inside, children will find a guide and blank page to help them write their own "animal wish" poem. They may choose familiar animals not yet included — deer, wolf, bald eagle, raccoon, owl — or broaden their view to write about animals from around the world.

This chapbook may be copied without seeking permission if used for educational and noncommercial purposes.